

Third Season of Excavations at Sahab, 1975

(Preliminary Report)

by

Moawiyah M. Ibrahim

The Department of Antiquities sponsored a third season of excavations at Sahab during the months of May and June under the supervision of the writer.¹ Sabri Abbadi, Muhammad Murshed Khadijeh, and Richard Dorsett served as Area supervisors. Kurt Langer de Polasky and Naim Ahmad were draftsmen. Wa'il Rashdan, 'Imad Dabbas, and Mahmud Ali Khalaf were in charge of pottery registration. Three men were trained at Jericho: Ayish Muhammad Isa, Sadiq Abdullah Abu-Khalaf and Ali Khalaf. Besides delineating clear stratification and balk trimming, they helped in pottery mending. Most of the 70 workers were hired from the town of Sahab.

The photographs were taken by Muhammad Murshed Khadijeh in cooperation with Sarkis Lepedjian and Abdul-Fattah el-Attar.

Abdul-Karim Ababneh, Architect of the Department of Antiquities, Remi Fenski and Barbara Atalla, two volunteers from the Friends of Archaeology, worked on a part-time basis.

The continuous support of Mr. Ghaleb Barakat, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, and Mr. Ya'coub Oweis, Director General of the Department of Antiquities,

and his Assistant, Mr. Yousef Alami, made a great contribution to the success of the expedition. The assistance of Mr. Minwir el-Abdallah, Mayor of Sahab, and the people of Sahab is sincerely appreciated. Their understanding that we were trying to identify the importance of their ancient site through the ages created a fruitful cooperation for the progress of the work. The dig also benefitted from visits by several colleagues of the Department of Antiquities and other foreign institutions and expeditions working in the country.

Excavations

During this season excavations were undertaken in three major Areas: B,D,E. From the large amount of Iron Age II pottery found scattered over the site, it has long seemed certain that there must have been occupation of Sahab during this period, but it was not until the '75 season that significant material was found.

Instead of extending further to the northeast the part of Area B that had been excavated during the 1972 and '73 seasons, circumstances obliged us to investigate part of the Iron Age II settlement concentrated in the middle of the site. The Municipality of Sahab was cut-

(1) Preliminary reports of the earlier seasons are published in: *ADAJ* XVII (1972), 23ff; XIX (1974), 55ff.

ting a modern street (running E-W) through the ancient site in its northern third, and as a result, a portion of the late Iron Age II architectural remains and deposits, in addition to a few modern houses, were destroyed by the bulldozer. It was necessary to lay out our trenches in the middle of the street right away, before it was completed. Thanks to the cooperation of the Ministry of Municipalities and Rural Affairs, and the Mayor of Sahab, the street-construction has been discontinued until the archaeological excavations are finished in this Area.

In Area D, a few new squares were opened. Two squares 4 X 4 m were excavated to the north of the Iron Age I building above the cave, which was partially excavated during 1973. More work in the cave itself provided better evidence about the nature of this cave. It was also planned to correlate with the main artificial mound, the Iron I building in this Area, which stands east of the major Iron I town. For this reason two separate trenches were cut on the gradual slope between the mound and the Iron I building. One was located ca. 30 m. to the west of the building, and the other was dug ca. 35 m still further west, on a small isolated mound close to the major ancient site.

Excavations in Area E were continued during this season to get evidence about the Late Bronze structure, and the much earlier Chalcolithic walls of domestic houses. The area excavated during the 1973 season was extended to the south by opening 3 new trenches (6 X 4 m) within the bulldozer cut.

Area B

It was decided to excavate the area at one point where a cutting for a modern street had been made. Ancient walls and occupation layers were exposed. One of these walls was standing up to the height of 1—2 m along the southern side of this street. Four trenches 8X4 m were opened. Trenches I and II were placed immediately at the southern side of the street-cut, along a large standing wall exposed in the section of the cut. Later on it was proved that this wall belonged to an Iron Age II architectural complex. Trenches III and IV are located north of I and II.

Immediately under the street-cut surface there began to appear a complex series of rooms built of selected large and medium-sized stones. Several modern pits and walls were found within the ancient complex. These modern remains were isolated from the ancient occupation layers. The pottery and other artifacts found with this structure date from Iron Age II (about 7th century B.C.).

The southern side of the street-cut is about 2 m higher than the northern one. There are inhabited houses along both sides of the street-cut. This makes it difficult to extend excavations on the northern sides.

Iron Age II Complex (Figs. 1-2, Pl. XXV).

The rooms of this complex are of different rectangular sizes built in a symmetrical way, and seen to have served as part of an industrial unit. All the walls uncovered were built in the same manner, of selected rough stones in the lower parts and sundried bricks on top, like

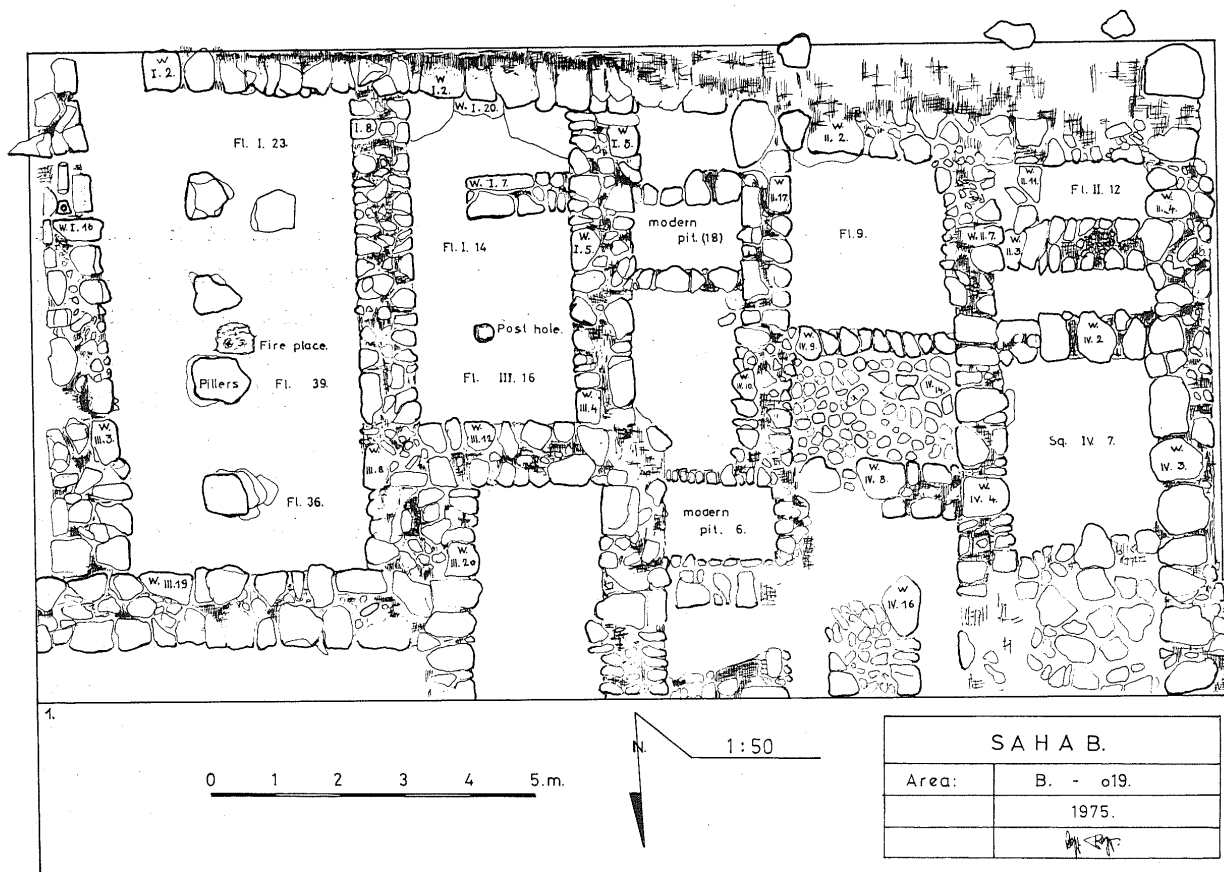


Fig. 1

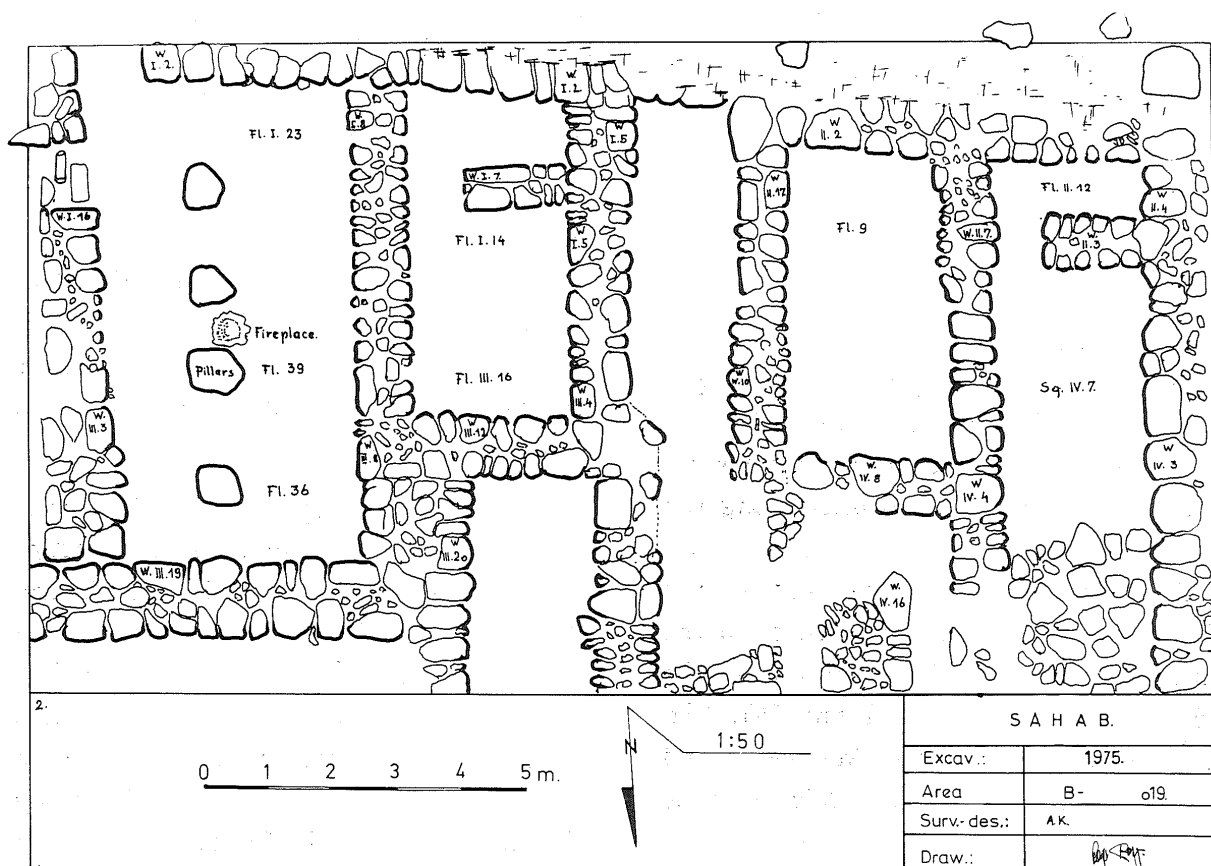


Fig. 2

those found in the room west of the "pillared room." They were set in a certain order beside each other, with the long side of the rooms towards N-S.

There is a street or a corridor (WI. 5, WIII. 4, WII. 17, WIV. 10) in the middle of the area excavated, dividing it into two equal parts. This corridor is interrupted by two modern pits (18.6). Pavement IV. 14 with walls IV. 9. and IV. 8, as well as wall WIV. 2, were added at an indefinite later period. The floors were similar in all rooms. They were made of a hard brown soil-layer 2-3 cms thick. Immediately under this floor was another earlier floor, in which foundation trenches for the uncovered walls were cut. This lower floor, which is of pink color mixed with white huwwar, served as a bed for the upper floor. No dating evidence or walls related to the lower floor were found during the season.

The northern part of the complex needs further work so as to clear the nature and shape of the northern rooms.

The largest and most interesting of the rooms in this complex was a spacious rectangular "pillared room" $7\frac{1}{2} \times 4$ m. (Pl. XXV. 1), in which four supporting pillars of big stones were built along the central length (N-S) of the room. Two of these pillar-stones, one above the other, were preserved. Two entries in the southwest corner of the room, one at the end of each wall, (WI. 2 and WI. 16), were identified. A door socket was found in the doorway of WI. 16. This doorway (Pl. XXV : 2) 1 m. wide, was blocked by

stones, among them a cylindrical leveling stone.

The floor of this room is of hard-packed brown soil. In the center of the floor a circular fireplace made of stones and mud was excavated. An amount of carbonized seeds lay gathered beside it. Flour-like powder covered the top of the floor. A number of grinding and polishing tools, made of basalt and limestone, were found, along with a basalt stone carved like an abstract votive figurine to represent a deity, (Pl. XXIX) and half of a steatite scarab. No conclusion will be given about the function of the room, though the presence of the abstract votive figurine may indicate that it had a cultic function. This proposal needs further digging and research, but in any case this room seemed to be a public one. Judging by the artifacts found in the other rooms (see below), there is no doubt that the whole complex had an industrial function.

There are just a few examples of the "pillared house" excavated in East Jordan. A series of pillared houses from the Iron Age II were excavated at Tell es-Sa'idiyyeh in the Jordan Valley, and Crystal Bennett excavated a very similar structure at Tawilan near Petra.

However, this type of room has been excavated in a large number of Palestinian sites, especially at Tell Beit Mirsim, Tell el-Far'ah Tell el-Qadi (Hazor), Tell en-Nasbeh, Tell el-Mutassallim (Megiddo), Jericho and others. Most of these examples were considered in various discussions, including two articles by Y. Shiloh.² I would like to discuss the

(2) Y. Shiloh, *IEJ* 20 (1970), 180ff, fig. 1-5; *EI* 11 (1971), 277ff.

development of this house-type after completing excavations in this area. At least one point could be mentioned, that the examples found within the Ammonite and Edomite regions do not fit with the conclusion of Shiloh: "The four-room plan was thus used as a standard plan for buildings of very different function within the Israelite City," though the present author may agree that the known examples do not necessarily have the same function.

Another room on the west side of the "pillared room" measures 5 X 2-5 m with no identified entry way. Walls WI-2, WI-8, WI-20, WI-5, WI-12 belong to this room. Wall WI-7 (1-5 m) divides the room into two parts leaving an entry way. The smaller part to the south, (ca. 1 m. wide) contained two elongated cylindrical bottles (Pl. XXXIII) similar in shape to the bronze bottle with the Ammonite inscription found at Tell Siran northwest of Amman. A nicely-made bone tool with pointed end (Pl. XXXII) was also found here. The northern part, three times larger, contained a rounded post-hole in the middle, and numerous objects such as : fragmentary storage jars with one rim bearing an inscribed letter (Pl. XXXII); sun-dried mud brick of large size; burnt or carbonized wood pieces; flour-like powder; pyramid-and round-shaped loom weights; (Pl. XXXII) a spindle whorl; a small fibula made of bronze (Pl. XXXII); several grinding and polishing tools made of stone and basalt; including a miniature table (Pl. XXIX), and a pottery tripod (Pl. XXXIV 1-2).

The mixture of these different finds suggests that this room was used either

as a workshop or for storage, probably related to the pillared room.

The situation in the corridor between Walls WI. S, WIII. 4 and WII. 17, WIV. 10, is not yet very clear. It is 1.5 m wide and excavated to a length of about 8 m. Two modern rubbish and drainage pits 1.5 m deep with walls on the sides were dug through the ancient corridor, destroying part of the Iron Age II walls. The two rooms west of the corridor were interrupted by secondary walls, WII. 11, WIV. 2, WIV. 9 and pavement IV. 4 between walls WIV. 9 and WIV. 8. Loom weights were found, a stone tripod, and an excellent collection of stone and basalt objects including grinding and polishing tools, and a nicely-grooved basalt bowl (Pl. XXXI).

The pottery found in this area (Pl. XXXIII) is typical of the late Iron Age II, especially in the region of Amman. The red-and-black highly-burnished slip and band-slip inside and outside the bowls and platters is very common. Some of the bowls have profiled rims and shallow disc-bases. Variants of the bowl have a small flat base and rounded walls. Painted specimens with dark thin bands on the in-and outside, covering the rim, are well-represented. Storage jars are of the ovoid shape with thickened overlapped rim and two handles.

The two elongated bottles (Pl. XXXIII) show an exaggerated length and short pronounced neck. The tiny nobs were placed below the neck. There are traces of black horizontal bands on reddish-brown surface. The Iron II Sahab inventory, including these bottles, have

good parallels among tombs groups found in Amman and Megabelein. One tomb group from Amman was dated through a seal which bears the text: "to Adoni Nur the servant of Aminadab.³ A striking comparison is the Bronze Bottle which bears a complete Ammonite inscription, found at Tell Siran, 6 kms northwest of Amman.⁴ The name of Aminadab is repeated twice on the Siran bottle. The two Aminadabs date within the seventh century B.C. This date would fit with the Assyrian records and the seal of Adoni Nur.

This type of bottle was considered by Olga Tufnel, Rudolph Dorneman and others as a reproduction of alabaster vessels.⁵ A more detailed study will be discussed elsewhere.

Area D. Cave

Work was continued inside the cave under the Iron Age I building. Better evidence was found about the nature of the cave. A trench was excavated in the west side to bed-rock, above which a thin irregular floor of hard-packed reddish soil was uncovered. A thick, ashy layer mixed with charcoal on this floor reaches a height up to 30 cms. The gap ca. 2 m between this layer and the cave ceiling had been filled with loose brown soil mixed with small stones. This fill seemed to have been accumulated after the Iron Age I building on top was deserted.

(3) PEFA VI (1953), fig. 23:126-130; see also Lankester Harding, Two Iron Age Tombs from Amman, QDAP XI (1945), 72:38; *ibid* An Iron Age Tomb at Meqabalein, QDAP XIV (1950), pl. XVI:13-16.

(4) Henry O. Thompson and Fawzi Zayadine, Tell Siran Inscription, BASOR 212 (Dec., 1973),

Pottery found in the fill and the ashy layer is mixed: Chal/EBI, Iron I and a few Iron II. The cave had apparently been cleaned to the original floor, the part excavated so far shows, and reused probably as a shelter or for storage purposes by the builders of the Iron I house. The excavators have no doubt that the cave was originally inhabited during the Chalcolithic/EB period.

The main entrance to the cave during this early period was in the west side. A well built wall, 1.80 m. high (Pl. XXVI) of large and medium stones, was built against the mouth (entrance) of the cave. The situation here, especially the shape of the cave and the wall at the entrance, reminds one very much of the inhabited caves found in Area A and B at Sahab (ADAJ 17, 1972). This is another example which shows that cave-habitation was wide-spread over different parts of the site.

Area D O 14. (Pl. XXVI, Fig. 3)

This Area was expanded to include one 4 X 8 m square (No. 4) on the north part of squares 1-3, excavated in 1973. It was excavated to an occupation floor above bedrock. The extension of main Room I was found under the balk between Squares 3 and 4. This wall, partially under the northern section, extends almost parallel to the southern wall of Room I. There is a regular gap between

5ff, fig. 1.

(5) O. Tufnel, PEAF VI (1953), 68; Rudolf Dornemann, The Cultural and Archaeological History of the Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages (Dissertation of the University of Chicago, 1970), 148f, fig. 39: Type 19.

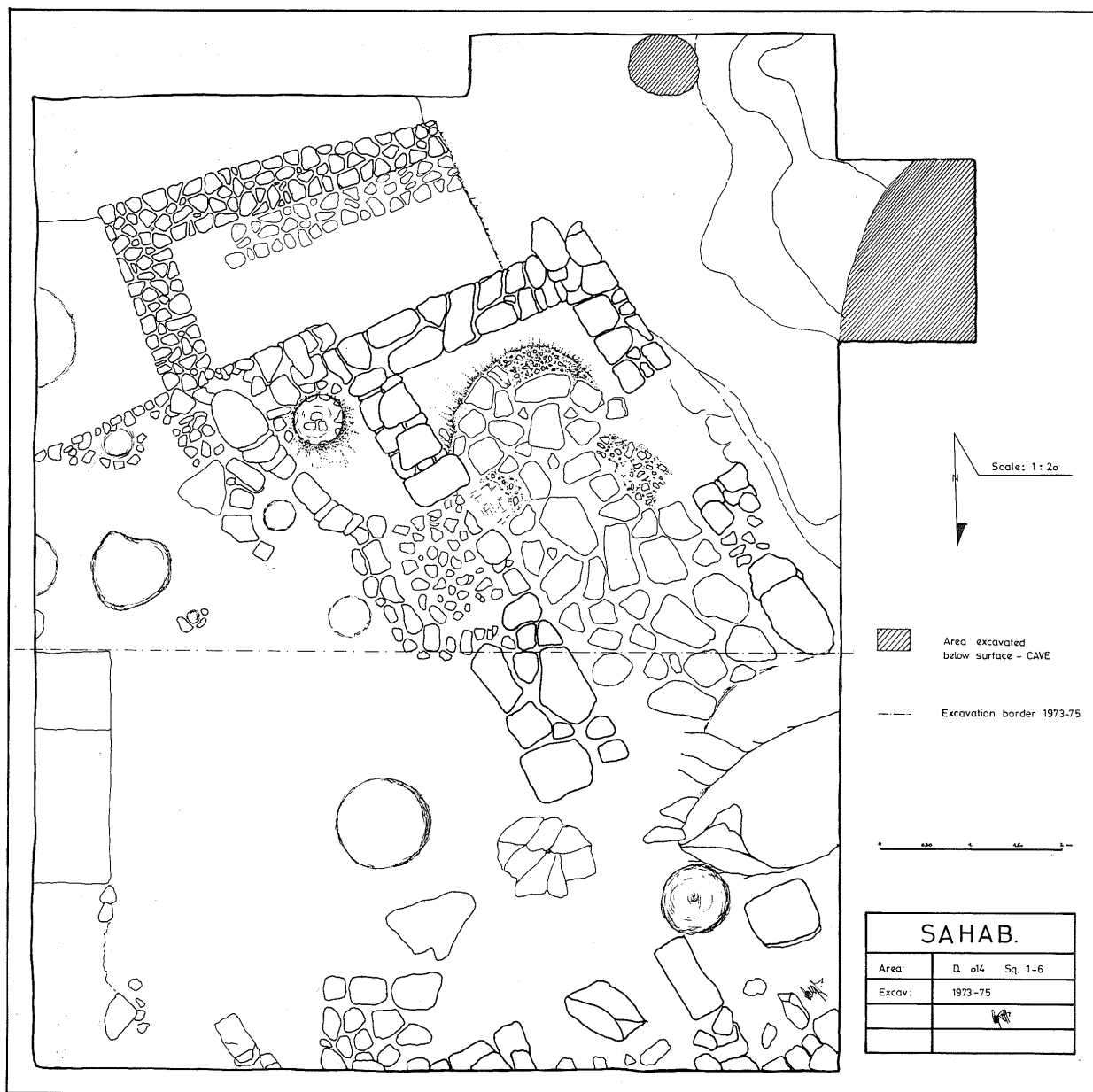


Fig. 3

the two big stones in the western side which may have served as a doorway or an entrance for the building.

Between this wall and Room I, a small rounded storage pit, rock pockets with ash, and a fireplace were cleared.

Sq. 4 includes in its east part a regular, almost square, plastered floor. The walls related to this floor seemed to have been robbed in antiquity. The Iron I pottery sherds with this floor, as in other parts of the building, were found frequently in large numbers. Cooking pots and other facilities, fireplaces, tabuns, as well as daily-use vessels, are related to a domestic house as suggested in 1973. Because of modern houses surrounding this area, there was no possibility of further digging. At this point the parts excavated had to be filled again for the safety of inhabited houses.

Area DO18. (Fig. 4)

During 1975 one square 4 x 4 m. was dug to virgin soil ca. 30 m. west of the Early Iron Age Building (DO 14). The purpose of this operation here and that of DO20, both on the east slope, was to search for the occupational phases between DO14 and the main artificial mound.

In this square, fill layers (L 1-8) of grayish-brown soil and small stones were removed to a depth of ca. 1.40 m. The pottery from these layers is mixed, representing the following periods: Chalc/EB, MB (?) and Iron II. These were followed by a truncated cone-shaped storage pit (L 11, 13), 1.30 m. deep and 80 cm. in diam., cut through Chalcolithic deposit and virgin soil and lined with stones,

preserved to a height of 75 cm. Pottery sherds from this pit date from Iron Age I. There were no other occupation remains within this trench related to the Iron I pit.

Beneath the fill accumulation were two layers: L 10 (fill) and L 12, which contained pure Chalcolithic sherds, similar to those found in DO20 and Chalcolithic structure of Area E. L 12 is a hard-packed floor representing the earliest and the main occupation evidence in this trench. A partly-preserved wall running NE-SW and a rounded storage pit, 70 cm. in diam., cut into virgin soil were related to this floor. On it were three interesting objects: 1) A large broken storage jar, part of it still under north section, with small flat base and badly-baked coarse ware. 2) A spoon with short pierced handle, made of stone, is similar to pottery spoons found at Tuleilat Ghassul. 3) A stamp-like piece with simple incisions had been formed in a square? shape.

Area DO20.

Another trial trench 8 X 2 m. was opened on the east slope of the small mound ca. 35 m. to the west of DO18. The work in this trench could not be completed during 1975. Fill accumulation layers (L. 1-13) ca. 2 m. deep were removed. Beneath these layers a pure Chalcolithic stratum (L. 14) with a well-built wall was partly excavated. The pottery from this stratum has close parallels to examples found in the earliest levels of DO18 and in Chalcolithic occupation levels of Area I. Investigations in this area will be continued during the coming season. At this point, it is probably safe

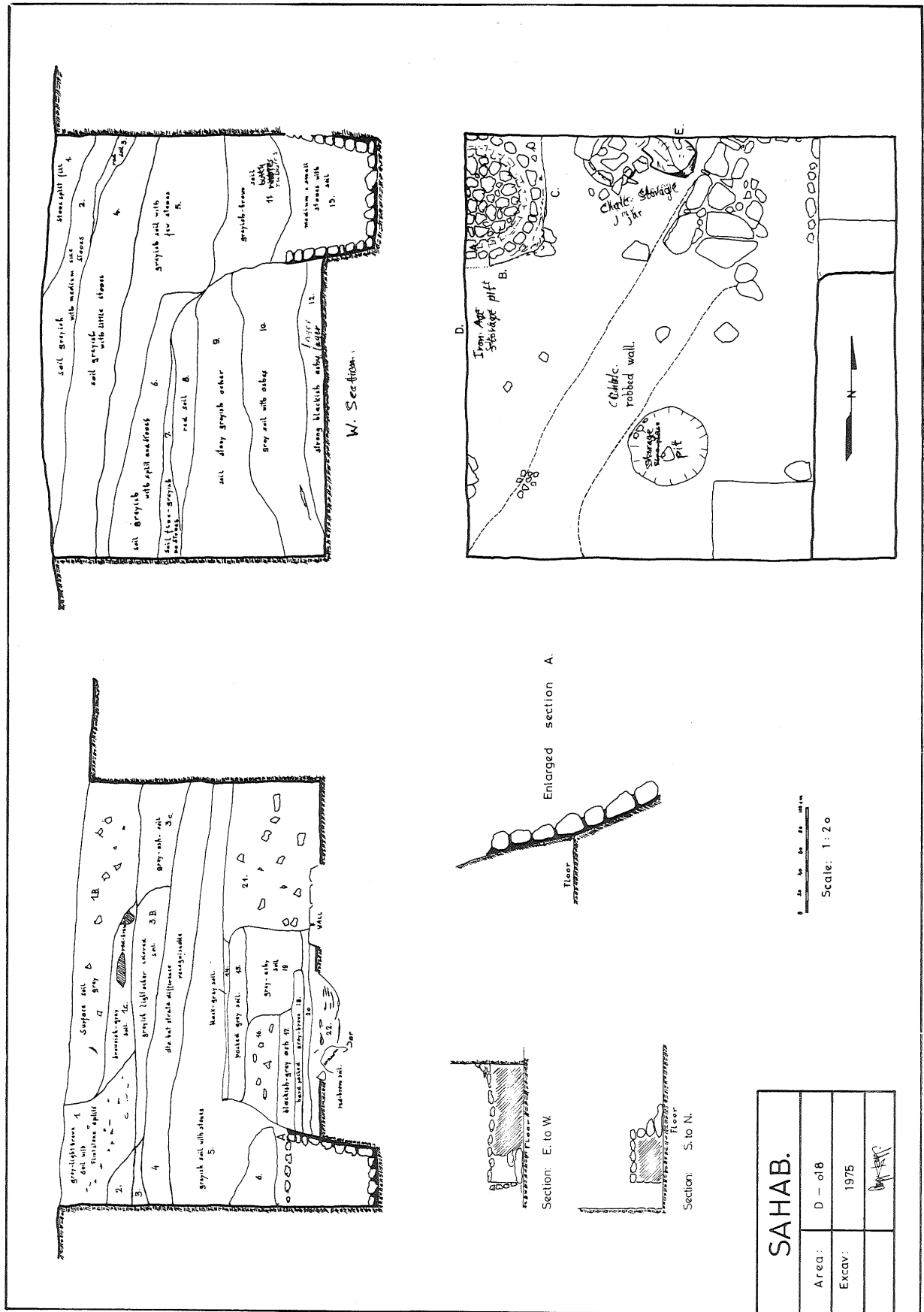


Fig. 4

to say that there was no major occupation during the Iron Ages, as indicated in DO18 and DO20, between Iron I building and the major Iron Age I-II settlement on the mound.

Area E. (Fig. 5, Pls. XXVII, XXVIII)

Work conducted in Area E at Sahab in 1975 was carried out to give additional exposure to the Chalco/EB walls found in squares E.1 and E.2 during the '73 season, as well as to provide more of the plan, dating evidence and stratigraphic context of the large L B structure which ran across the area.

Three new squares were laid out in '75 just to the north of squares E.1-3, in an east-west direction, leaving a 1 m. balk. Square E.4 was 3 m. wide (N-S) X 6 m. long (E-W), E.5 was 3 m. wide (N-S) X 5.6 m. long (E-W) and E.6 was 3 m. wide (N-S) X 6 m. long (E-W).

Surface soil throughout the area excavated was artificially created by a bulldozer-cut, prior to the '73 excavations, which had destroyed a large amount of the Iron Age remains in Area E. In addition to bulldozer action, which would have packed down the new surface level, it had been sitting since '73 under a large pile of building stone and so, as excavated, was exceptionally hard-packed. In color, the layer was medium to light brown or tan and had occasional small stones (10-15 cm. diam.) but sometimes ranging up to medium size (25-30 cm. diam.).

Under surface soil were several loci which throw some confusion onto the

exact sequence of post-Chalco/EB occupation at Sahab. Further excavation to the north of the L B structure in the future should help to clarify much of the problem, but certain points at this time can be shown.

A reddish-colored soil layer ran throughout the area under L.1 (i.e. E.4.1, E.5.1 and E.6.1) which appeared most thickly in square E.4 where bits of various-colored mud brick was found, along with bits of charcoal, ash and huwwar. E.4 pottery evidence seems to indicate an Iron Age I date for this layer of occupation. It is interesting to note the appearance of L B pottery in this layer, but more especially there was frequent M B sherds as well, which in '73 seemed to have appeared in small quantities.

First appearing in E.4, then throughout the area under layer 2, was an extensive huwwar layer (E.4.3, E.5.3 and E.6.9) which has thrown some light on the phasing of the L B structure in relation to some earlier material. Most significant was the fact that the foundation trench of the L B structure cut through the huwwar layer, thus putting the huwwar layer earlier in date. The small amount of accumulated material associated with either the huwwar layer or the L B structure seems to indicate a strong period of erosion(?), or perhaps just general non-occupation in this area of the site. At this point further work is badly needed.

Two of the walls (Pl. XXVII Fig. 5) which ran off to the south of the main L B long wall have been shown to be part of an almost square structure with

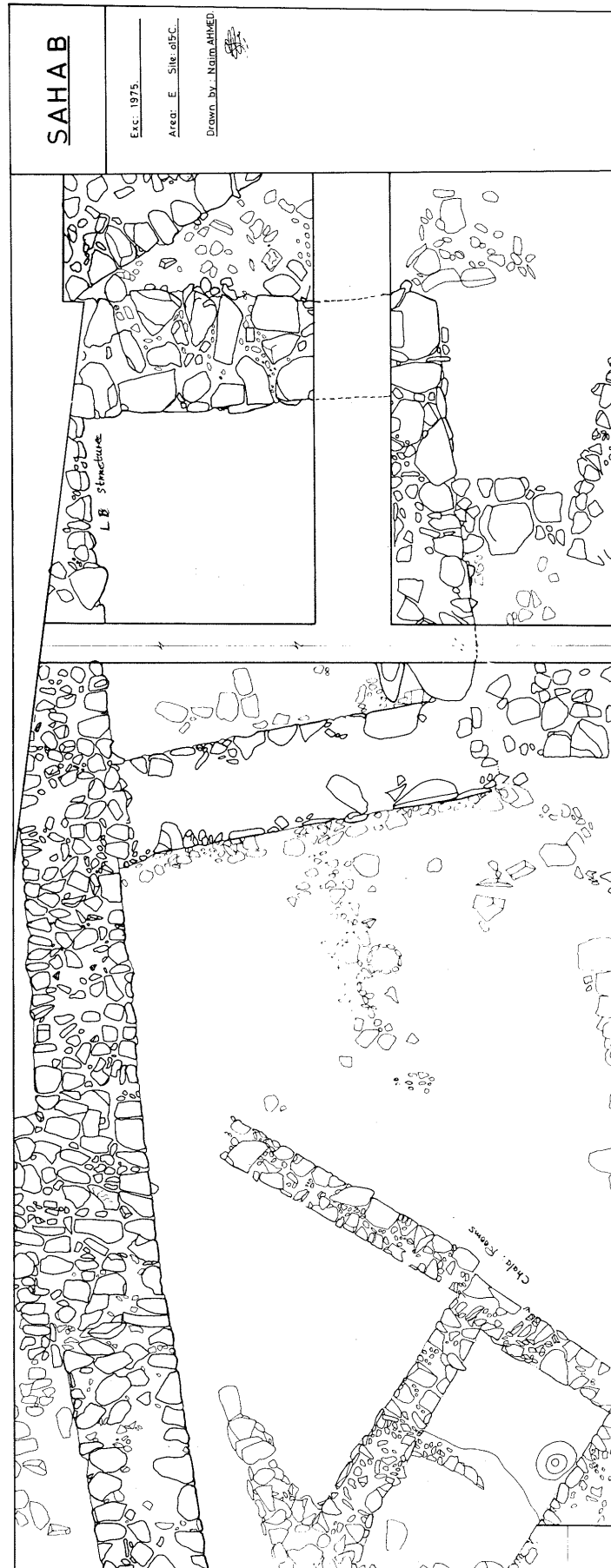


Fig. 5

corners appearing in the NE corners of squares E.5 and E.6. No doorway or indications of function have yet appeared. Inside of the square structure the red packed-soil layer which appeared as a floor in '73, was probed, but it too, like most of the other contemporary material, seems to rest directly on Chalco. /EB levels of occupation. No side walls of the L B period were found in the western part (sqs. 1, 4) of the excavated area, though the long wall continues to run under a big modern house to the west. This makes it difficult to search for the western remains of this important L B structure. Among other L B pottery sherds related to this period, an important Mycenaean sherd (Pl. XX) with incomplete design was found. Plans are to extend the work to the south and to the west of the main street running N-S.

The Chalco./EB Material. (Pls. XXVII, XXVIII, Fig. 5)

During the '73 season of excavations it became apparent from both Chalco./EB domestic walls in area E, and from cave occupation in other areas, that there was extensive occupation at Sahab during the late Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age. During the '75 season more evidence for occupation during this time appeared in area E.

Especially in squares E.4 and E.5, sealed under a prominent dark soil layer (E.4.8) and E.5.7) there began emerging large amounts of pure early pottery. A small amount of similar material had come to light in E.6, but at this time the soil layer is not yet fully defined, and it is the soil fill and architecture that was

excavated in squares 4 and 5 that are here discussed.

The most prominent feature was a two-room, well-built structure that appeared in E.4 and which ran slightly into E.1 after the removal of the E.4/E.1 balk. The first room of the structure (12a) was evident in the square running in a NE-SW direction. It was rectangular in plan with the NE end of the room running under the west balk and seemingly into the foundation of a modern house. The other room, (12b), seemed to be added after the first room was constructed. This is indicated by the jutting out of the eastern wall of the second room, 12b, which was built against the northeast corner of room 12a. The walls were ca. 50 cm. thick and were made of undressed stones ca. 25.35 cm. diam. smaller stones were used for chinking and filling the gaps left in the wall. At its highest point the wall stood ca. 1 m. except where it began to run under the floor level (L.14) into a large pit (L.16). A blocked doorway was apparent in the northeast wall of Room 12a which was not removed.

The pit (L.16) poses somewhat of a problem for exact phasing of the walls of L.12. The northern edge of the pit runs outside of Room 12a under the northern walls and it seems clear that the wall was constructed after the pit was dug. The southeast wall of the room runs down into the pit following the contour of the depression, and indicates that the pit was present during the construction of 12a. The floor of the pit was a very hard white layer of plaster (packed huwwar and soil) and was lined with a wall of the same material, as in the wall

of room 12a. An ample amount of seeds were collected from the pit. This indicates its function as a storage pit. Wall 12b was a single wall extending NE from the NE corner of 12a, and was built onto the pre-existing wall, but of virtually identical construction. It bound L.15, as well as a hard-packed floor level (L.17). With these floor levels of the domestic wall for the '75 season appearing stratigraphically earlier than the founding levels for the cruder domestic walls of the '73 season, it appears safe to assume that L.15 would have been the founding level for the slightly later material. This type of subterranean pit, with walls on top, is known at Tuleilat Ghassul.

To the east of wall 12a/b, was a soil fill, and a floor level, L.13, which continued into square E.5. L.9 was a dark-brown soil layer which appeared above the floor level, and E.4.10 was apparently a backfill against wall 12a, and seemed to have been post-occupation material. In E.5 the floor level was cut by what seemed to be another large pit and continued horizontally to ca. 1 m. west of the L B wall foundation trench, which was the limit of excavation for the '75 season in these two squares.

Investigation into Chalco./EB floor levels, as well as the large pit in E.5/2, would seem very worthwhile during any coming season. The area closest to the L B wall should be given somewhat of a priority, since in the past season the exact relationship of the earlier floor

levels to the later domestic walls remained a problem.

The pottery found on the floors of this early construction turned out to be pure "Chalcolithic" and earlier than some of the pottery from caves in Areas A and C, which contained good EB pottery examples. Hand-made sherds found with the early structure in Area E, and in Area DO18 and DO20 have parallels with some of Ghassul types and wares, including thumb indentations, loop and small pierced handles, thumb-indented ledge handles, and dark-brown colored bands. Storage jars have a slightly inverted rim with a small flat base. Most of the bases, including mat-impressions, are flat. Detailed study of the pottery may show local forms, especially among bowls. Affinities with materials found at sites in the Jordan Valley have been temporarily designated as Neolithic/Chalcolithic. In 1975-76, a large number of these sites were explored by the joint team of the Jordan Valley Survey, with concentration on the Qatar hills and along main wadis of the Valley, including Tell Umm Hamid, Zerqa River, Wadi Nimrin, Wadi Kufrein and Wadi Adheimah.⁶ Future study of discoveries from Sahab and the Valley will hopefully throw more light on the chronology and material culture of this early period.

CONCLUSION

The earliest evidence found at Sahab dates from the Chalcolithic period. Extensive occupation of this period, of which some of the cave-dwellings, well-built

(6) Preliminary reports on the results of the East Jordan Valley survey will be published

in the near future by the author together with James Sauer and Khair Yassine.

rooms and pits were excavated, goes beyond the main mound to include Areas E, DO14, DO18, DO20, in addition to prior excavation Areas F, and Cave deposit in Area B. The pottery inventory from these Areas shows affinities with Ghassulian sites. Some of the cave material has to be assigned to the E B period.

Other parts of the L B structure in Area E were uncovered, without determining its function or solving the stratigraphical problems.

Apparently scattered houses had been built after the destruction of the major

Iron I town, as indicated in Area D, and trial trenches on the east slope.

During Iron II, the town seemed to be smaller but better planned than it was in the Iron I. The material found under the modern cut surface of Area B belongs to the end of Iron II period (7th century B.C.) A complex series of rooms had large amounts of stone and basalt mortars, loom weights and other tools, suggesting that at least part of the rooms had been used for industrial purposes.

It is hoped that more intensive work will be done at Sahab.

M. M. Ibrahim

The Department of Antiquities